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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002361

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SUBJECT: SUNNI INDEPENDENT MP CLAIMS IRAN BEHIND ALL EVLI

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Independent Sunni Arab parliamentarian Mithal Alusi told Poloff on July 14 that in his view, Iran was funding all sides in the Iraq conflict, saying a premature U.S. withdrawal will mean the U.S. will have to fight Iran in Bahrain. He alleged that Saudi Arabia and Iran were behind the campaign to discredit the draft hydrocarbon law since they want to hinder Iraqi efforts to boost oil production and keep world prices up. Saying that he had seen the investigative file on Culture Minister Asad al-Hashimi's involvement in his sons' murder, Alusi termed the evidence substantial. He denied a political motive in pursuing the charges against the murderers of his two sons. He called on the U.S. to intervene in shaking up the current ineffective Iraqi government to bring in qualified technocrat ministers. With the poor public perception of the current government, provincial elections would bring gains for the Sadrists among the Shia and the Hawar party headed by Saleh Mutlaq among the Sunnis, said Alusi.
END SUMMARY.

IRAN FUNDING ALL SIDES IN IRAQ

¶2. (C) Independent Sunni parliamentarian Mithal Alusi claimed (offering no evidence) that Iran was funding all sides in the sectarian struggle in Iraq - the militias, the insurgency and Al-Qaeda. Saying that Iran wants the U.S. to lose in Iraq, Alusi termed Iran as the source of all evil in Iraq and called for a nationalist Iraqi response. Iraqis are more nationalistic than religious, he claimed. Commenting on a potential early U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq and alluding to Iranian designs in the region, Alusi said the U.S. could either fight Iran in Iraq or later in Bahrain. An early U.S. withdrawal will ensure that Iraq becomes a breeding ground for international terrorism, he concluded.

HYDROCARBONS LAW NEEDS TO BE SOLD TO THE PUBLIC

¶3. (C) Claiming that oil interests in Saudi Arabia and Iran are behind the successful efforts to discredit the hydrocarbon law with the Iraqi public, Alusi said that the Iraqi government must engage in an immediate public relations campaign to highlight that the law is in Iraq's interest. The neighboring oil producing states fear that a large increase in Iraqi oil production will depress oil prices and diminish their influence in the region. The PR campaign should appeal to Iraqi nationalism and include charges that it was Iraq's neighbors who were behind the smear campaign against it, he stated. (Comment: The acting Speaker of the Parliament, Shia Islamist Khalid Attiyeh also claimed to us on July 15 that Saudi interests were helping the Iraqi groups denouncing the oil law. End

Comment.)

CASE AGAINST CULTURE MINISTER SOLID

¶4. (C) Alusi told Poloff that he had seen the evidence against Culture Minister Asad al-Hashimi and that it was significant. He said al-Hashimi was implicated in other murders, not just those of Alusi's two sons during a botched assassination attempt in 2005 for which al-Hashimi was charged. Downplaying claims that the confessions of the alleged killers were obtained through torture and therefore unreliable, Alusi said the killers divulged details about the crime not generally known. Alusi said he asked Prime Minister Maliki to stay out of the case and let the judicial process continue without interference. This is not a political case, said Alusi, citing Maliki's release of Adnan Dulaymi's son when he was stopped at the Baghdad airport and the suppression by Maliki of other arrest warrants against prominent Sunnis. He claimed that Tawafiq leader Vice President Tarik al-Hashimi is attempting to quash the arrest warrant and investigation of the Culture Minister.

GOVERNMENT NEEDS SHAKE UP - U.S. SHOULD INTERVENE

¶5. (C) Alusi claimed he is in contact with both Prime Minister Maliki and Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi about the need for a government shake-up. He called for the political leaders to designate 12 ministries as reserved for non-political technocrats. Poloff, commenting that

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getting the political leadership to agree to any names was difficult in the past, asked if Alusi had any proposed names or a mechanism for reaching a political agreement on ministerial changes. Alusi responded that U.S. should lead this effort to protect its own interests.

NEW ELECTIONS WOULD STRENGTHEN SADR AND MUTLAK

¶6. (C) In the current political environment, the Sadrist and Sunni nationalist firebrand Saleh Mutlak would see large potential gains in provincial elections, according to Alusi. Despite the recent boycott of Cabinet meetings, the Tawafiq participation in government and inability to produce results for their constituency has lowered their standing with the Sunni population, he opined. With increased sectarian tensions, Mutlak, who as head of the Hewar political party did not join the government and has been consistent in his criticism of the sectarian basis on which it was formed, would likely benefit at the cost of the Tawafiq and the Iraqi Islamic Party, according to Alusi. The Sadrist grass roots appeal and Iraqi nationalism give them an edge over established Shia parties like Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI formerly SCIRI) and Da'wa, whose leaders are too close to Iran, said Alusi.

Comment

¶7. (C) Alusi is a well connected with a wide following among the diminishing Baghdad intelligentsia and traditional elite. He still has a weekly political salon - a reminder of an older era of Iraqi (and Arab) politics. Alusi heads his own political party and is its only elected member of the Council of Representatives. Within Sunni Arab political circles, he is one of the least sectarian politicians and therefore has a certain respect among Shia and Kurdish political circles. His assessment that Shia

and Sunni hardliners stand to gain from new elections is particularly interesting, as they would be his direct competition. Alusi's pushing the case of the Culture Minister, and the government's follow-up, has provided the immediate pretext for the Tawaffuq ministers' boycott of the cabinet. There are negotiations underway to find a compromise. End comment.

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